Assassination Papers on JFK Opened to Public

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WASHINGTON—Scores of researchers, reporters and assassination theorists descended on the National Archives Monday to begin poring over 800,000 pages of newly released documents on the death of President John F. Kennedy.

The files, organized in gray cardboard boxes, held long-secret CIA cables and memos about Lee Harvey Oswald, as well as most records of the Warren Commission, the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1979 and the 1975 Rockefeller Commission study of CIA domestic activities.

Release of the heavily censored records was mandated by Congress

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last year. The documents show, among other things, frantic activity by the CIA and FBI to learn about Oswald's foreign travels and the possible involvement in the assassination by foreign powers.

"There are cables concerning Oswald's Cuban and Russian contacts, some details of which had been previously revealed, and a memo in which a Soviet defector working for the CIA speculates that the murder was arranged by the Soviet secret police.

"But, in the view of one expert on the assassination, "there is nothing earth-shattering here."

"After perusing the files, G. Robert Blakey, a Notre Dame law professor who has written extensively about the assassination, said: "People who think the assassination resulted from a conspiracy will find confirmation of their theory, and those who don't think so will also find support for their beliefs."

The Warren Commission concluded in 1964 that Oswald acted alone when he shot Kennedy as the President's motorcade moved along a Dallas street on Nov. 22, 1963. But the House assassination panel concluded in 1979 that there was evidence of more than one gunman and speculated the Mafia

Associated Press

Surrounded by a horde of television and print photographers, researchers go over material at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., dealing with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

might have been involved in the slaying.

Blakey, who served as chief counsel of the House assassinations panel, told reporters that "the real significance of this release is that the American people can have direct access to the records and can make up their own minds."

Opening of the records was ordered by Congress under the JFK Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, which required that all relevant documents in the government's possession be sent to the National Archives to be made public by Monday.

The action by Congress followed a rekindling of public controversy by Oliver Stone's 1992 film, "JFK," which was based on the theory that Kennedy was the victim of a government conspiracy involving the CIA and the Defense Department, among others.

Blakey and another authority, James H. Lesar, a Washington attorney who heads the nonprofit Assassination Archives and Research Center, had called for the release of 160,000 additional pages of CIA material, but the agency has denied that request, primarily, it said, to protect its intelligence sources and methods.

The two men also called on President Clinton to promptly appoint a review board authorized by the congressional act to compel agencies to release material still being withheld.

"President Clinton has so far failed to implement this crucial provision of the JFK Act," Lesar said. "The board is long overdue."

Among the records released were CIA cables from the days immediately following the assassination. One dated Nov. 25, 1963, said: "Request [name blanked out] be queried as to his knowledge of Lee Oswald contacts with Cuban and Soviet embassies."

Another cable that same day read: "Please ask Mexican immigration to check all their records since June 1962, when Oswald returned from the Soviet Union, to see if he entered or left Mexico at any other time than the 26 September to 3 October 1963 period. We still do not know what if anything Oswald told his Dallas interrogators about travel to Mexico."

In a memo two days later, Peter Deryabin, a former Soviet KGB official who defected to the CIA, wrote to his new bosses that the Soviet secret police may have instigated the slaying to relieve internal pressures on then Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

"Our President's death . . . effectively diverts the Soviets' attention from their internal problems [and] directly affects Khrushchev's longevity," said the memo, which officials later characterized as speculation on Deryabin's part.

Another document reported that Oswald had a sexual relationship with a woman in Mexico whom the CIA apparently had targeted for possible recruitment. She was a Mexican citizen working for the Cuban consulate.

Its significance was not clear, although Lesar told reporters that "it raises a new level of uncertainty as to what was really going on" during Oswald's visit to Mexico City.

Oswald, a former Marine Corps radar technician, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959, where he met his future wife, Marina. After redefecting to the United States in 1962, he made his mysterious trip to Mexico City in late September, 1963, two months before the assassination.

The new records failed to shed light on whether he was recruited there by Cuban or Soviet officials to shoot Kennedy or whether his purpose was to obtain a transit visa through Cuba in order to return to the Soviet Union.

A CIA memo dated Nov. 25, 1963, said the Secret Service advised "that a phone call from one Jose San Antonio Cabaca in Mexico City . . . was monitored 24 November 1963. Conversation was in Spanish and gist of it is: Plan of Castro carried forward, Bobby is next. Soon the atomic bombs will rain and they will not know from where."

A CIA official later cabled he could find no trace of any "Cabaca."